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SUBJECT: UN'S JOHN HOLMES RAISES OGADEN FOOD DELIVERY CRISIS

Summary

1. (SBU) The UN Emergency Response Coordinator and Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes briefed select representatives of the donor community September 3 on his discussions with the Ethiopian Government (GoE) on the "malnutrition crisis" in Ethiopia. He noted that, while access to the Ogaden had improved since his last visit, the number of people in Ethiopia at risk had risen from 4.6 million, as announced by the Ethiopian Government on June 12, to 8.4 million as concluded by a later joint assessment. Deputy Prime Minister Adissu confirmed that the numbers had risen but was skeptical of the higher number, mentioning a lower figure of 6.1 million. Holmes noted that critical food needs will continue at least until June 2009 when the rain fed agricultural production in Ethiopia could return to normal. Holmes warned that the situation could still get worse and that more resources are still needed. The main food distribution problem in Ethiopia remains the Somali region, especially in the Ogaden, due to security concerns and lack of capacity. While the Ethiopian leadership says that it supports a WFP/donor proposed "hub and spoke" approach to expedite food delivery, it has yet to be implemented. Holmes also raised reported human rights abuses and the problems of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Somali refugees in the Ogaden region. Finally, Holmes stated that donors need to focus more on agricultural development and working together with the Ethiopian government on measures to cope with the cyclical droughts. Better donor coordination, to include non-traditional donor countries which deal with Ethiopia as well as a more robust coordination of donors led by the UN are important. End Summary.

Food Crisis

2. (SBU) UN Emergency Response Coordinator and Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes met with representatives of the donor community on September 3 to review his trip to Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's region (SNNPR) and Ogaden parts of the Somali region, and his discussions with Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Adissu and review his upcoming meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda. The Prime Minister was not in Addis to meet with Holmes. Holmes first emphasized that it was unusual for him to make two visits to a country in less than a year, but that he felt that the crisis in Ethiopia was not being taken seriously enough. He noted that access to the Ogaden, both for the UN agencies and NGOs, had improved since his last visit. Holmes noted that

feeding centers in SNNPR were functioning well and that the people welcomed food rather than wages in the Productive Safety Net Program. Food was so expensive, that food payments for work are preferred. While rains are so far robust, it is still unclear if it will be sufficient to ensure another bumper crop from rain-fed agricultural production this year in Ethiopia. Holmes told the donor community that food will continue to be needed until at least the end of 2008 when "normal" harvests could resume, pending good rains.

13. (SBU) Holmes said based on as yet unapproved results of the belg harvest assessment, there are now at least 8.4 million people at risk of severe malnutrition in Ethiopia, an increase from the 4.6 million announced by the government on June 12. Recounting his discussion with the DPM, Holmes noted the Ethiopian government did not want to make public this issue. Holmes urged them to do so in order to secure additional international food assistance and highlight the continuing food emergency in Ethiopia and the region. Holmes made clear to the participants that the situation could still get worse and urged all representatives to make clear to their respective capitals the continued need for food, humanitarian assistance, and other resources.

14. (SBU) Throughout the Somali region, and especially in the Ogaden, the lack of adequate rains for the past three years has made the situation bleak. Local officials hoped for rain to at least provide grazing field for animals. Donor representatives and Holmes agreed that food distribution was proceeding in all areas of Ethiopia except the Somali region.

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The U.S. Ambassador emphasized that only 30 percent of the food needed in the Somali region has been delivered and that it was difficult to confirm the distribution of most of this food allotment to intended beneficiaries. Holmes noted he raised with DPM Adissu rumors of food being siphoned off by the Ethiopian military or by groups aligned to the government in the Ogaden. The DPM adamantly denied these rumors. Holmes also raised allegations of human rights abuses by the Ethiopian military to which the DPM said such reports were exaggerated, misleading, or not true. Holmes said he pressed Adissu on the "hub and spoke" food delivery approach for the Somali region as proposed by the U.S. and WFP which the Ethiopian Government agreed to support. Adissu reaffirmed the GoE's support, but Holmes noted that it was still not being implemented. (Note: The "hub and spoke" approach would allow for large trucks to carry food from the port of Djibouti to distribution points in the Ogaden and then allow smaller trucks to distribute the food. End note.) Insurgency problems and details over control of storage and delivery, Adissu said, are constraints to approval and operations, but he assured Holmes that the Ethiopian leadership will implement this approach.

#### Security Concerns

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15. (SBU) Holmes remarked to the group that Ethiopia is very much like other countries which are facing insurgency problems or areas of conflict. Governments wish to control food deliveries in their efforts to manage conflict zones. The U.S. Ambassador raised U.S. efforts to persuade the Ethiopian leadership to open up the Ogaden and ease restrictions, from U.S. military officials discussing General Petraeus, manual on counterinsurgency measures to USAID's arguments and examples on the effectiveness of a very open and transparent food delivery system. The U.S. Ambassador also raised Ethiopian concerns for cross border infiltration by extremist elements as well as an increase in violent insurgency operations by domestic rebel groups. But the U.S. has been arguing to the Ethiopian government for a more transparent and open delivery process which will, in the end, prove more effective in getting food to the right beneficiaries and earn greater support from the local

population.

#### Solutions and Frustrations

16. (SBU) Holmes suggested that the UN organizations in Addis Ababa will take a more active approach in coordinating donor interaction and a common approach with the Ethiopian government. The donor community must also interact more cooperatively and with a single message in discussions with the Ethiopian leadership. The multi-donor PSNP group and new Humanitarian Subgroup of the Donor Assistance Group were noted as examples. Donors must also maintain constant links with headquarters in their respective capitals, noting especially that the food crisis will continue until next year, and perhaps beyond, if the main rains prove inadequate.

To cope with the cyclical droughts in Ethiopia, donors must work with the Ethiopian government on agricultural development assistance. Over 97 percent of food production is rain based and there is very little irrigation. An emphasis on development assistance will help Ethiopia cope with, and survive, the periodic droughts. The donor group also agreed that a stronger effort toward coordination, as well as including non-traditional donor nations which have close ties with Ethiopia, will be important in pushing the Ethiopian government into a more pro-active and cooperative partner in the food distribution to the Somali Region. Such countries include Russia, China, Israel, and India. The donors noted the importance of the continuation of current on-going efforts including the joint UN-US meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and regular meetings called by the UN and also meetings with NGO partners arranged by the U.S. Embassy. Finally, Prime Minister Meles, expected visit to New York for the UN General Assembly can be an important opportunity for the donors group to press the Ethiopian leadership on the food crisis in the Somali region and Ogaden and other problems.

17. (SBU) The donor group noted that Holmes, visit, his second in less than a year, was highly useful and deeply

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appreciated. There is a need to have the senior-most officials from donor countries, as well, visit Addis to underscore the urgency of the food crisis and the need of the Ethiopian government to work closer with the donor community in meeting the urgent food and other needs. Representatives from Ireland, the UK and Holland stressed "donor fatigue" in securing additional assistance for Ethiopia. More important, they expressed deep frustration over the apparent lack of "urgency" by Ethiopian officials. While Prime Minister Meles may understand the gravity of the problem, many officials have not moved, especially in establishing the "hub and spoke" food distribution or approving NGOs to work in the region. USAID noted how damaging the slow humanitarian response was both in terms of lives as well as Ethiopia's image politically and economically. Holmes noted that the people he met with in the field also expressed frustration over the slow distribution of food. Somali region pastoralists told Holmes that the drought is the worst since 1928, and with Somalia also in crisis they have nowhere to go to save their animals.

#### Other Issues

18. (SBU) Holmes said he also raised with the DPM the CSO/NGO law as being too restrictive on the international donor community which supports and helps Ethiopia. On his trip to the Somali region, Holmes visited Lafaissa refugee/IDP camp outside Jijiga to highlight the problem of the internally displaced in the region and Ethiopia generally. He noted that there is no system in place in Ethiopia to handle IDPs and suggested that a strategy needed to be developed to handle humanitarian and protection needs of these special groups.

Comment

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19. (SBU) Holmes cautioned that donor frustration over food deliveries to the Ogaden must be balanced between valid security concerns and sovereign issues with humanitarian concerns. We plan to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister with the UN chief Fidele Sarassoro and the U.S. Ambassador plans to have a private meeting with the Prime Minister to follow-up on the Holmes visit and continue donor efforts to get the "hub and spoke" approach implemented and NGOs approved. Further, the U.S. will press on assurances provided by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister last month of greater openness and ability by USAID and OFDA to monitor and coordinate food deliveries in the Ogaden and other regions. Post strongly recommends that USG principals raise concerns about humanitarian relief access and facilitation of food distribution mechanisms with Prime Minister Meles in bilateral discussions on the margins of the UN General Assembly. Holmes mentioned that UNSYG Ban would also raise these issues with Meles in New York. End comment.  
YAMAMOTO